

7/2/23 - Psalm 73 - "When Your Heart and Flesh Fail"

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 July 2023

Preacher: Brenton Beck

[0 : 00] Today we're going to be in Psalm 31. It's page 485, I believe, in the Pew Bible if you want to read along. It'll be on the screen. In the ESV, it reads, Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.

But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

For they have no pangs until death. Their bodies are fat and sleek. They are not in trouble as others are. They are not stricken like the rest of mankind.

Therefore pride is their necklace. Violence covers them as a garment. Their eyes swell out through fatness. Their hearts overflow with follies. They scoff and speak with malice. Loftily they threaten oppression.

They set their mouths against the heavens and their tongue struts through the earth. Therefore his people turn back to them and find no fault in them. And they say, How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?

[1 : 09] Behold, these are the wicked. Always at ease, they increase in riches. All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence.

For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning. If I had said, I will speak thus, I would have betrayed the generation of your children.

But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task. Until I went into the sanctuary of God. Then I discerned their end. Truly you set them in slippery places.

You make them fall to ruin. How they are destroyed in a moment. Swept away utterly by terrors. Like a dream when one awakes. O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms.

When my soul was embittered. When I was pricked in heart. I was brutish and ignorant. I was like a beast toward you. Nevertheless, I am continually with you.

[2 : 09] You hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel. And afterward you will receive me to glory. Whom I have in heaven but you. Whom have I in heaven but you.

And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail. But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. For behold, those who are far from you shall perish.

You put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. But for me it is good to be near God. I have made the Lord God my refuge. That I may tell of all your works.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks, Pastor. Thanks, Pastor. Today marks a new series that's going to carry us through the next nearly a dozen Sundays.

And this is going to be a journey through book three of the Psalter. And our attempt of this series is not to necessarily go through a chronological take of all of book three.

[3 : 24] But simply to hone in on a spread of themes that are found within the third book of the Psalter. So, you can thank me because rather than just hitting you with lament for three weeks in a row, we'll spread it with lament and then thanksgiving.

And try to see what the Lord's Word can speak into our lives today. That is the goal of every sermon. And for that I'm excited about doing that.

Some of these Psalms are written by the sons of Korah. Some of them are written by Asaph. We'll get to know these individuals pretty well over the next several weeks. So, I'm excited to dive into the first Psalm today of the book of the Psalter, the third book of the Psalter.

And I'd like to begin with a question. Have you ever experienced a descent in your Christian faith?

Have you ever experienced a descent in your Christian faith? Maybe that's precisely where you are today. In this descent of faithlessness, of doubt, of worry.

[4 : 45] Maybe this was you last year. Or maybe something that God providentially sees fit to take you through tomorrow or next year.

Now, you can thank me for making this a rhetorical question and not a standing and sitting poll where I don't know if we would all be of the utmost honest as we would feel almost called and embarrassed to say that we struggle.

Right? Our culture today, it's all about the apparent power and strength, the broad shoulders, the high, tall stature. You don't get either of those with me.

So, we're on a good path. But you may sense that vulnerability of struggle to be honest with yourself. Well, there's one who, if he were gathered today, maybe sitting in one of these chairs here today, he would stand boldly and confidently when many of us would probably try to avoid that.

His name, we're going to call him Honest Asaph, is the author of this psalm. He was a Levite choir director who was put into service in the tent of meeting, and that's recorded in 1 Chronicles 639.

[6 : 15] Asaph turned his plight into a song to be sung. Now, it's not dust in the wind, which is this dreary tone of all is lost, no hope.

All we are is dust in the wind. Right? No. He exploits his weakness, and in so doing, exploiting God's strength.

And it appears often when we are looking at things going on around us, and we say, God, why does good things happen to bad people?

Why? Them? You're going to give them the world while I'm sitting here, struggling, feeling like a hamster on a wheel?

It appeared for Asaph that bad things were happening to good people. That bad things were happening to good people, and good things were happening to bad people.

[7 : 38] And do you ever wonder and struggle with this? I mean, it's not what we would expect, I would imagine, from a sovereign God. It's not something we would expect from a righteous God.

A good God. A loving God. Right? Where might the answer be found to that question? Job searched.

If you can recall Job's plight. He searched and received no answer, which was in turn his answer. Well, Asaph, for us today, he provides for us a road map.

A road map for us when our faith descends and reaches the near-breaking point. When we think, we're about to break.

Let's dive into Psalm 73 and see Asaph's descent, his near-breaking point, and then finally this reascension back to faith.

[8 : 46] I want to pray as we enter into this. And with those remarks, I'm going to break this up into three separate sections. And I'll introduce the title after the prayer.

Let's pray. Father, we come to you today, and we are just asking you for help, to be honest with ourselves, to just be vulnerable, to be authentic with our struggles.

Because when we can finally just reach the end of ourselves, we realize that you've been holding us all along. Father, help us to see that today.

And we pray this by the power of your Spirit working in our lives, and by the power of your Word speaking into our lives. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. So we have a sermon title, When Your Hearts and Flesh Fail.

Amen. And so what I want us to see is thematically what is going on in this passage as we're taken through Asaph's words.

[9 : 59] Now, if you are new with us this morning, definitely welcome to Steel Valley Church. And it would be most helpful having a physical copy of God's Word in your hand.

And if you won't, I'm not going to sit there and point you out as, well, you're not going to do that here. But it is very, very, very helpful to have your Bible open, to go through the verses as we're going through them and allow God to just unfold His story for you.

And so thematically speaking, we see the first section being the descent. And we see this occurring in Asaph's life from verse 1 to 12.

Look with me. He starts out in verse 1, Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled.

My steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the arrogance when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. The tension of his struggle was weighing what he knew about God.

[11 : 10] Verse 1, that's something you know about God. It's where theology comes in mind. The tension is between his struggle with what he knows based on what he is observing in verse 3.

So verse 1 is over here and verse 3 is over here and he's balancing it and he is in the middle in verse 2, struggling. And he confesses his sin of doubt in a moment where he almost slipped as he's looking at this and looking at this.

Something he knows versus something he's seeing. And it's just not making sense. And for that, he descends in his faith. But why?

Why? It's that very reality that we talked about just a moment ago. The wicked are prospering in verse 3.

I saw the prosperity of the wicked. Look at the details within this descent. Man, this plane is going down fast. Verse 4 through 11, this is the description of that descent.

[12 : 25] They are well provided for in verse 4. They're evading trouble and oppression in verse 5. They wear their pride honorably and are dressed in violence in verse 6.

They're full of lies in verse 7. They scoff. They speak evil in verse 8. They curse heaven in verse 9.

They are blameless in the sight of man in verse 10. And they dismiss the all-knowing God in verse 11. The wicked not only prosper, but they are at ease as they're increasing in riches.

This created resentment for Asaph against God in verse 2. You see, the psalmist begins a descent in faith, a near-complete fall where he slipped, all on account of the apparent grace of God towards the wickedness of man.

He struggled with that. Isn't this our problem too, though? Perceiving God not treating us the way we think we should be treated or that others are thriving all around all the while we're suffering or that others are coasting through life, not a care in the world, while we are toiling.

[14 : 04] Maybe you believe you're free from those fleshly tendencies, that you have arrived in your faith and you are not that kind of Christian, never struggling with the descent of faith.

Well, if a Levite priest struggled with it, I would think that maybe your judgment is slightly flawed a little bit. You're not being honest with yourself. Considering the rise and the foundation that social media plays in our day today, you can't escape it.

It's literally ingrained in society. And the rise of social media has normalized the highlights of other people's lives.

It's a stage, literally, that if something happens in your life, you think, is this worth sharing or is it not worth sharing?

You literally are vetting your own life if you should put it on this stage of social media. media. It's intended to be a place of social connection, but it's become such a hideous source of depression.

[15 : 18] Have you ever scrolled and wondered why, for those who think that this doesn't apply to them, that they have arrived, have you ever scrolled social media and wondered, why can't that be me?

Why can't that be me? Look at, they have a happy family in that picture, perfect lighting.

They have a wonderful, big home. Look at all the things in the background of that house. house. Why can't that be me? Look at their new car they bought.

Why can't that be me? Look at, they're married. Another one of my friends got married. And for singles in the room, why can't that be me?

Oh, they had children. How wonderful that must be. Why can't that be me? Attractive bodies. That other people are flaunting like candy.

[16 : 27] Why can't that be me? Maybe you just notice that other people's lives seem really quiet while yours is just a complete train wreck of chaos.

Thinking, why can't that be me? Or maybe it's just simply the fact that other people are smiling and you can't muster up the strength to put a smile upon your face.

Why can't that be me? You see, at the foundation of Asaph's plight was a pre-existing situation of suffering.

Things in his life weren't going right. And he's got his Facebook open. He's got his Instagram feed running. man. And he sees the wicked people of the world having fun, living their best life.

Smiles, joy, happiness, care, free, all the while while Asaph is suffering. Asaph's struggle was simple but yet profound being a Levitical priest.

[17 : 46] He wanted, he desired to remove himself from his situation and live in another. He didn't want this.

But what he'd soon discover is that this was very wearisome to him because it would in turn remove him from God's plan and God's purpose to desire to be somewhere else and someone else.

And you see, church, at the deepest level of the phrase, why not me, is literally a misunderstanding that we have given our heart to the world.

When we have this struggle with comparison, why not me, we have literally given our heart to the world. Don't fall for it.

And no, I wouldn't say that fake obligatory post to make everything seem like you're happy and you've joined the happy club with all the other highlight reels is not going to solve your problem.

[19 : 06] Because the reality of social media, there's studies done, it's pretty clear, that it's usually those who are often the most discontented people in life are posting the most often, that are revealing how happy they are, of how good they look in this bathing suit.

Because at the root of that post is a deep discontentment of what they're trying to conceal and hide, put on this facade.

Maybe the basis of our dissent in life is that we have forgotten the gospel. Isn't that the hidden doubt of why not me?

That you've forgotten the gospel? Maybe we've forgotten that once we inquired that same question, not to some person's life on social media, but to the cross of Jesus Christ, that we once looked upon the cross and said, why not me?

Because I am guilty. And now you're looking at vanity and saying, why can't that be me? Church, we have forgotten the cross.

[20 : 28] Where am I in my notes? Church, don't forget that we don't deserve the air that we breathe. We don't deserve a home.

We don't deserve a marriage. We don't deserve children. We don't deserve smiles. We don't. And when we realize that is the foundation of what we do have, because all we have, then, is Jesus Christ.

Amen? Amen. Forgetting the cross creates a problem of envy, wanting something that someone else has had. Coveting, the Bible might call it.

And envy is criticizing God. It's saying, what you have for me, God, isn't good enough. That is at the source and the root of envy.

It's sin. And I believe, if we were honest, this comparison game that is being played in many of our lives, and I'll just put myself on the chopping block, I struggle with this greatly.

[21 : 39] And I'm with you on this. This text ripped me apart this week. But if we're honest with ourselves and playing the comparison game that many are playing in our lives, we must repent from that sin.

We must repent. If repenting is turning away from idols, as 1 Thessalonians talks about, so too we are turning away from this vanity of life and embracing the cross.

Before our faith begins to descend, the more you stay in this world of vanity, longing for vanity, the more prone you will be to descend, and for that you will.

I'll just give you a sermon link when you're in that place to this sermon. This affected the psalmist deeply, that it practically broke him.

This was the nearly slipped moment in verse 13, and we see that in the breaking point from verse 13 to 17. Verse 13 says, Here we receive an insightful reminder of what sin does in our lives.

[23 : 13] Sin breaks us to the point of snapping. And doom scrawling will break you, church.

This psalmist's breaking point reached its peak as he turned back to look upon his life and to compare it to the world. I would imagine it in my mind just watching two things play out, his miserable life and the wonderful world of easy living and the wicked and he's standing back and he's looking at this and he's discovering that everything he's doing, everything he's trying to do, it's just a waste of time.

Haven't you been there? Having low motivation to keep pressing on, being discouraged in life? Like everything you're doing is a complete waste of time.

Yeah, the pastor says, read the Bible, but I've read the Bible and it's not changing it. anything. Low motivation, discouragement. Everything was pointless.

You might as well just give in to sin, go to that bar, look at that website, you know that would make all of us cringe to visit the girl or the boy that you haven't seen in a while.

[24 : 43] Well, the old self is calling you home, right? Just give up, like a good cheers episode. You walk in and everyone welcomes you.

This is a time of strickenness as he's looking at these two things playing out. This is the second mention of him being stricken. Previously in verse five was in reference to all mankind being stricken.

But how might mankind and the psalmist be stricken? Well, we see it's something that you can't escape. And I was talking to a gentleman this morning who brought me into some insight of his struggle with chronic pain.

Just every morning it's the same. Every morning he is stricken by this reminder that his body is betraying him. If anybody struggles with chronic pain, you know exactly what I'm talking about.

And look how this psalmist says, for all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning. You can't escape it. And the gravity of this breaking point held in the psalmist's life was certainly a critical moment that he had to consider very carefully.

[26 : 01] He was filled with chronic thoughts. What's the point? It's like I'm being punished. It was critical because that very reality and succumbing yourself to that truth can become a toxin to other people's faith.

Misery does like company. And for that the psalmist says in verse 15, it could have led other generations astray. It is indeed a toxin.

But reaching the turning points, the psalmist is not far off in thinking that he is being punished because he is being punished.

He thinks he is being punished for serving the Lord, but it is actually reasonable to say that he is punishing himself for not being devoted to the Lord, being more attracted to life than that which is eternal.

And in verse 15 and 16, as we're reaching this turning point, there's something kept not only by not only keeping his words in verse 15 to not spread this stuff like a toxin in the tent of meeting, but also something deep down relating to his understanding is keeping him in verse 16.

[27 : 20] In fact, what word does he describe in verse 16? He says it was a wearisome task to think of giving up hope.

The decision that he longed for seemed easy, but the path to actually do that for someone who has been chosen by God, who is being sanctified, is the most wearisome task to ever think that there's an easy path in life.

Isn't that the whole premise of the Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan, right? I could have just opened this up and just read to you this morning, Pilgrim's Progress.

And you see in verse 17, the only hope, the only hope for the psalmist is what he knew, not what he felt. It was his only hope of what he knew, not what he felt.

What did he know to do? Verse 17, the turning points. It occurred when he assembled himself in the sanctuary of the Lord.

[28 : 38] The psalmist found refuge in the covering of the sanctuary. He went to church.

Isn't that amazing? Here and only here, his wearisome chronic thoughts would be guided, informed, and actually dispelled. What was once a wearisome burden became a refreshing delight at the reminder of the humbling reality in his descending faith?

Church, the descent of faith is wearisome. It is very difficult. It seems conceptually easy to go that pathway, but the road is so wearisome.

And what's the good news for us, church? God will meet you when your faith descends. He will meet you when your faith descends.

Where is he going to meet you? In the sanctuary of God. This assembly should not be a duty. It should be a delight. Asaph's perspective shifted, and he repented from his sin of comparison, of envy, and beheld the glory and truth of God.

[30 : 04] It all happened by the power of simply being within the proximity of the sanctuary. And if in proximity of the sanctuary, proximity of other people.

This is amazing, church. So simple, yet so profound. Because we notice here, nothing really changed at all.

Well, nobody, no wickedness that he saw around him stopped. His situation didn't change. His neighbor was still a cuckoo. He still went to work and had this terrible boss that seems to really enjoy putting him down, right?

And now these are all hypotheticals. But notice, nothing changed in his life, but his worldview changed.

And that's very crucial to see. He didn't have to shut his Facebook down. Nothing changed on his Facebook. Nothing changed on his Instagram.

[31 : 07] All the facades were there, but a new, content outlook was developed after leaving that sanctuary. An outlook that overcame him in the sanctuary.

And I've got to hand it to you. A church like us, having the full revelation from Genesis to revelation, we ought to be striving to this same contentment in our evil days.

We certainly know today where we can find hope as we reach our breaking points. It's as the psalm sings, tune our hearts to sing thy praise.

We need a good heart tuning within the sanctuary of God. And we see this ascent. After that breaking point, sort of is brought back to life and revived.

And so as verse 17 said, the psalmist was raised back to faith through simply worship of the Lord in the Lord's sanctuary. Worship, singing, praying among a body, fellowship, all within the community of God.

[32 : 33] And I'll get into that more momentarily, a little bit more. But look with me for a moment of what was revealed to him. In verse 18, all the way to verse 20, the psalmist discovered it is not he who's actually slipping.

Do you see that? As he said in verse 2, he almost slipped. He realized that it's not he who slips, but the wicked who are going to slip. They're walking on slippery ground.

And so this is not going to happen by the hands of the psalmist in retribution, but by the hands of God and his judgment. In verse 18, the end of the story for the wicked will end within a flash.

They are memoryless, immaterial beings in verse 20. I know it's not things that you tell the wicked to make friends with them, but that is the theological reality that should give us hope that we don't have to worry about anything that's going on out there.

We have to worry about what's going on in here. Amen? In fact, the effect that the wicked had upon this psalmist was like a toxin in his life, which fueled his confession in verse 21 and 22.

[33 : 53] He says, When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in the, where? Heart. It was his problem. Verse 22, I was brutish and arrogant.

I was like a beast towards you. Remember, that's honest Asaph. You can't get much more honest than that. To tell God, I was a beast towards you.

In other words, whenever we fail as being disciples of Jesus and become our own rabbi, our own dictator of truth, we start to think like animals.

Animals who have no conscience, have no awareness of God. Yes, I'm sorry to insight into the spiritual life of your dog or your cat. There is no conscience.

There's no awareness of God. And not only do we think like that, like animals, guess what?

[34 : 54] We begin to act like it too. And church, to be overpowered by the temptations of the wicked is to be powerless to the great commission that Jesus Christ commanded for His church, for you and I.

Why does the church want what the world has to offer? Have we completely forgotten the gospel? The world should want what the church has to offer. We offer everlasting life in Jesus' name.

We offer living water that never runs dry. Through the cross, through Jesus Christ, church, do not be fooled. In the sanctuary, though, things shifted.

What specifically? Verse 24 and 28 to give us some insight. And these are verses that should be memorized upon the heart of every Christian and stored within our hearts.

A beautiful melody that drives our faith. Look with me. In verse 24, you guide me with your counsel, and afterward, you will receive me in glory.

[36 : 02] Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Oh! That is a melody. What a melody. We might ask, what in the world happened in that sanctuary that day at the breaking points of the psalmist's life?

Well, it sounds like God was near and he finally realized it. Verse 24, God guides with counsel.

God receives His people in glory. Verse 25, nothing on earth matters but God. Verse 26, our hearts, our flesh may fail, but God is over our lives.

If in the world the psalmist faced significant injustice, then only by the power of the Lord will justice be given. No earthly legislation can cause or come close to liberating the needs of the psalmist than the legislation of God's Word being written on his heart.

[37 : 24] And so for that, the problem is not around, it is within. For that, cultural Marxism, well, an interesting philosophy on how to make things right just won't do.

Social justice endeavors just won't do. No, God's presence will do. It is our justice.

This is a theological truth, intellectual truth. It is a redemptive truth. It's an emotional truth. You feel that truth. It's an experiential truth, but it is a supreme truth over all the lies.

And so for us, in verse 27, for those around, there's nothing to envy of them and everything to pity. There is.

The psalmist concludes with the reality of judgment for those who abandon God, who don't realize that while they might have all the riches and are increasing, they might claim it that it's happening in God's name, but in reality, apart from faith in Christ, all of it is vanity.

[38 : 37] It has an expiration. Their smiles will expire. Their things will expire. Their happiness will expire. Their joy will expire. They have a shelf life.

And so if you're not in Christ today, you have to know that apart from your faith in Jesus Christ, your facade of life has a shelf life.

It has a shelf life. Apart from faith in Jesus Christ is an abandonment of God. Apart from faith in Jesus Christ will come a cost that you are going to have to pay someday.

It is payable upon death. And so come. Receive the sufficient payment for your sin. Come by faith in Jesus Christ.

The call is simple. Believe in Jesus Christ and the work that He did on the cross and turn from vanity into meaning. I love how R.C. Sproul once asked, or once was asked, sorry.

[39 : 51] He was asked, why do bad things happen to good people? I couldn't get it out of my head when I started thinking about it this week. Love R.C. R.C.

responded simply, well, that only happened once and He volunteered. Amen. Church, we have to see the fundamental error in falling for the sin of comparison or envy.

Who has given us the human capacity to think? Who has given us the human capacity to feel or to long? Who has set His image upon us?

Who has extended His hand of salvation into our lives? Who has given you your next breath within this sanctuary? This is a heartbreaking biblical truth because we reject what God gives.

We've sinned. We think that we're victims and God is this perpetrator. We choose self-rule. Rather than God's rule. We learn that and discover that in 1 Samuel.

[41 : 06] It's a problem of old that just repackages itself into our world today. And for that, R.C.'s role is right. Even regeneration doesn't magically remove the struggle of sin in our lives any more than it does the title of Levitical priest.

And for Asaph, he struggled, but he had hope. And for us, we may struggle, but we have hope. Might we be reminded, too, of the gospel in our toil in this life.

That when we descend in our faith, we're reminded of Jesus Christ to descend into this life to dwell with us.

And as we descend and reach a breaking point, we're reminded of Jesus Christ who came down and dwelled with us. and at our breaking point, we remember Jesus Christ who was broken for us.

And to remember, why not me in light of looking at the cross of Calvary? Only then we're given hope of ascension with Jesus Christ and new life by our faith as Jesus Christ ascended and conquered death and brings new life.

[42 : 22] Don't you see that this entire toil of descent and ascension of faith is the gospel story? Let your toil in this life, your struggle, be reminded and rooted in the gospel.

So how do we keep ourselves from descent? You're not going to keep yourself from descent, but Jesus Christ will keep you in your descent.

Man, I love you guys. And if your proximity is close to Jesus Christ, you will naturally be found in proximity with other people in the sanctuary.

This is a theological truth, not a duty, but a delight. I'd like to close with this. Charles Wesley, I know, he's a Methodist hymn writer. You can stone me after the church service, but he's got some good tunes.

But on his deathbed, in his final breaths in life, he reflected on this psalm. He reflected on it.

[43 : 29] And he called his wife to get a pen and paper, and he says in this psalm, in age and feebleness extreme, what shall a sinful worm redeem?

Jesus, my only hope thou art, strength of my failing flesh and heart. Oh, could I catch a smile from thee and drop into eternity.

Such wonderful words that he took away from this psalm. But will you or will I in the next season of descent be remedied your way or God's way?

Will you remember how to turn your breaking point into a turning point? Will you uphold what you know regardless of what you feel? Well, God has given us His sanctuary that we cannot neglect.

Look around this room. You cannot neglect this. So, may this sanctuary be a weekly reminder as we assemble and surround ourselves upon the truth of heaven and turn from the lies of the world.

[44 : 45] Here and only here we ask, why not we but looking solely at a bloodstained cross? Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.

Let's pray.